

12100 TULIP GROVE DRIVE (HOUSE)
(The Rancher)
(The Buckingham)
Belair at Bowie, Maryland
Bowie
Prince George's County
Maryland

HABS MD-1263
MD-1263

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
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12100 TULIP GROVE DRIVE (HOUSE) (The Rancher) (The Buckingham)

HABS No. MD-1263

NOTE: Please see the following historical reports for additional information about the history of Belair at Bowie, Maryland:

Belair at Bowie, Maryland (overview)	HABS No. MD-1253
12418 Stonehaven Lane (The Cape Cod)	HABS No. MD-1254
12420 Stonehaven Lane (The Cape Cod)	HABS No. MD-1255
12408 Stonehaven Lane (The Rancher)	HABS No. MD-1257
12500 Swirl Lane (The Two-story Colonial, 4 bedroom)	HABS No. MD-1260
12400 Shadow Lane (The Two-story Colonial, 3 bedroom)	HABS No. MD-1264
Belair Bath & Tennis Club	HABS No. MD-1265
12401 Sussex Lane (The Manor House)	HABS No. MD-1267
12405 Sussex Lane (The Rancher)	HABS No. MD-1269
12413 Salem Lane (The Country Clubber)	HABS No. MD-1270
12406 Skylark Lane (The Country Clubber)	HABS No. MD-1271

Location: 12100 Tulip Grove Drive, “Belair at Bowie, Maryland,” Bowie, Prince Georges County, Maryland.

Significance: The house at 12100 Tulip Grove Drive is a representative example of the perennially popular Rancher model after its 1962 redesign, which, except for some minor changes to its already well-conceived plan, was largely cosmetic. By lining up the roofline of the two wings and reorganizing the facing materials on the elevations visible from the street, Levitt and Sons created a more unified, more horizontal composition that better reflected the popular aesthetic appeal of the postwar, suburban “ranch” house. Located on a spacious corner lot, this house was built with the optional two-car garage, an option that became increasingly popular over the standard one-car garages over the course of construction at Belair.

Historian: James A. Jacobs, HABS

Description: Early in March 1962, “unveiled” the redesigned Rancher at Belair’s sale and exhibit center on Sussex Drive, which would be built in all future sections of Belair did not have façade, only color variations. Located along the border of the Tulip Grove section of Belair, the house at the northeast corner of Tulip Grove Drive and Trainor Lane is an example of the new Rancher that was constructed on a high-profile site sometime in 1963-64. While not especially long, Tulip Grove Drive was one of the more

bathrooms 90°, so that only the master bathroom had an exterior window, which could no longer be looked into so easily from the front porch; the second bathroom relied entirely on mechanical ventilation. Along with this reconfiguration, the removal of the heating equipment to the laundry at the rear of the garage allowed an increase of square footage in the master bedroom. The house at 12100 Tulip Grove Drive was built with the double-garage option, which *The Washington Post* reported in March 1965 was being selected by “more than half of the homebuyers at Belair.”² In addition to being a desirable amenity for the ever-increasing numbers of two-car households, in the case of The Rancher it further reinforced the low-lying presence of the house.

The Rancher was the only direct carryover of an earlier model in Levitt and Sons 1961 product line used to open Belair.³ The firm previously approached one-story models with caution because their comparative cost per square foot was greater than similarly-sized multistory houses; however the company could not entirely ignore the American obsession with one-story “ranch” houses and the easy, casual, family-oriented lifestyle popularly associated with them. The company half-heartedly acknowledged the market potential in 1949 with the Rancher version of its New York Cape Cod, which was followed by a three-year experiment with thousands of single-story Levittowners in Pennsylvania.⁴ Levitt and Sons devised a one-story model known initially as House B for its New Jersey subdivision, which opened in 1958. The model’s contribution to a more varied streetscape was probably its most compelling attribute. House B sold poorly and within a year was replaced by an entirely new one-story model that Levitt and Sons developed for both New Jersey and for the new development being planned for the Maryland exurbs, or outermost suburbs, of Washington.⁵

In contrast to its immediate predecessor, the new Rancher model quickly became a favorite among buyers. For the exterior of the L-shaped house, the company created two traditional facade variations, one with a gable roof facing front and one with a hip roof. Eighteen months after opening sales at Belair, Levitt eliminated the hip-roofed version

² “Big Demand for Garages at Belair,” *The Washington Post* 20 Mar. 1965, sec. F: 2. Among the houses put into production at Belair, only The Country Clubber offered a standard two-car garage.

³ The 1961 product line was also used in new sections of Levittown, New Jersey, where the number of marketed models increased from the original three (a one-story, a one-and-one-half story, and a two-story) to six (The Rancher, The Cape Cod, three- and four-bedroom versions of The Colonial—each with a distinct front elevation, and two luxury models: The Country Clubber and The Manor House).

⁴ For a full discussion of Levittown, New York, models, see Barbara M. Kelly, *Expanding the American Dream: Building and Rebuilding Levittown* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993); for an overview of Levittown, Pennsylvania, see “Technology: The Most House for the Money,” *Fortune* 46 (Oct. 1952): 150-56+.

⁵ “Look How Bill Levitt Is Meeting the Changing Market: More House, More Money, More Value,” *House & Home* 16 (Sep. 1959): 138-143, for one-story model redesign. Levitt and Sons had been planning Belair since late in 1957 and the firm would have had both markets in mind with the design of what became known as The Rancher.

Selected Bibliography:

“Bill Levitt’s Third Big Town: More Value for Less Money.” House & Home 80 (Aug. 1958): 72-85.

“Cape Cod, Rancher Popular at Belair.” The Washington Post 14 Sep. 1963. Sec. D: 16.

Levitt and Sons, Inc. “Belair at Bowie, Maryland.” 1962.

“Look How Bill Levitt Is Meeting the Changing Market: More House, More Money, More Value.” House & Home 16 (Sep. 1959): 138-143.

“New Levitt Model.” The Washington Post 13 May 1967. Sec. C: 34.

“New Rambler Shown at Belair.” The Washington Post 6 Jun. 1964. Sec. E: 21.

“New Rancher Popular at Belair.” The Washington Post 31 Mar. 1962. Sec. D: 7.

“Ranch Model Is Enlarged.” The Washington Post 21 Mar. 1964. Sec. E: 11.

“Unveiled by Levitt.” The Washington Post 3 Mar. 1962. Sec. D: 7.

Project Information:

The project was sponsored by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) of the National Park Service. Support was provided by Stephen E. Patrick, Director of Museums, City of Bowie. The documentation of Belair at Bowie, Maryland, was undertaken by HABS, Richard O’Connor, Acting Chief, Heritage Documentation Programs; under the direction of Catherine C. Lavoie, Acting Chief, HABS. The project leader was HABS historian James A. Jacobs. The documentation was produced in 2006-08, written history by HABS historian James A. Jacobs and large-format photography by HABS photographer James Rosenthal.

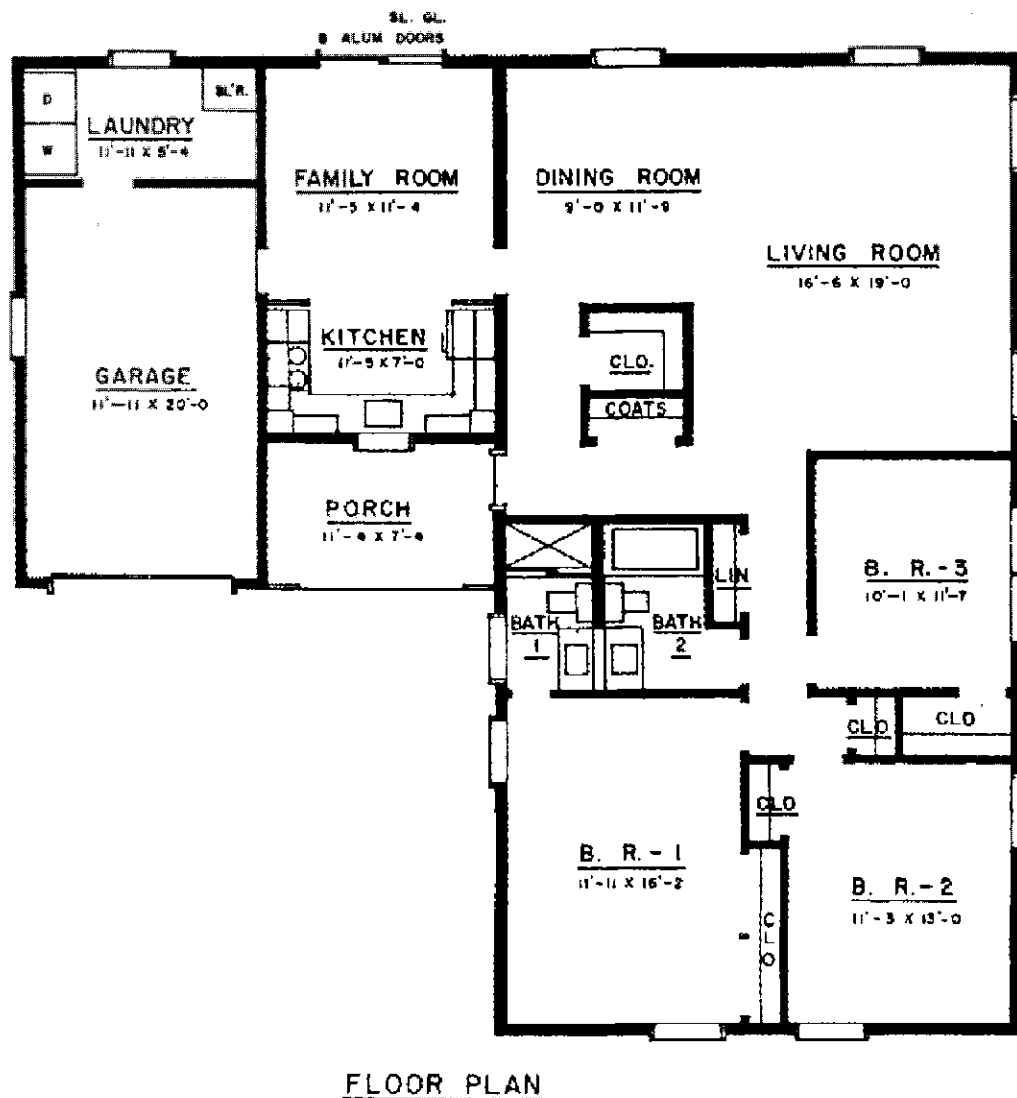


Fig. 1. The Rancher model, floor plan, 1964. As completed and initially occupied, the house at 12100 Tulip Grove Drive had this floor plan, except that the garage and laundry room was doubled. Author's collection.

important roadways in the southern portion of Belair. It forms the border between the Tulip Grove section and adjacent Foxhill, meandering from an entrance into the community at MD Route 197 (Collington Road) on the west to Belair Drive, another major roadway, on the east. Along Belair Drive, just to the south of its intersection with Tulip Grove Drive, stands an historic allée of tulip poplars, providing the inspiration for the road and section name. These poplars are among the important remnants of the Belair estate on which Levitt's development rose. The historic stables are located on Belair Drive at the end of Tulip Grove Drive just down from the former estate house that fronts on that road. The center block of the house dates from the colonial period and is flanked by wings constructed early in the twentieth century during the Woodward occupancy; for a time in the 1960s, the house functioned as the town hall for the City of Bowie.

It is not known exactly why Levitt and Sons chose to redesign their popular Rancher model only three years after it was introduced; regardless, the new version had a more contemporary presence along the streetscape. The plan of the house retained its basic shape, size, and layout and most of the changes were on the exterior. The design was considerably more visually streamlined than what came before. Roof pitch and the limited use of masonry cladding were used in such a way that the side-facing gable looked as if it were a wing of the rest of the house. The new Rancher retained the gable-fronted version, but lowered the roof pitch, creating a single ridgeline and giving the house a more unified composition.

Generally, in order to keep costs down Levitt and Sons limited to the façade the more expensive sheathing materials and architectural decoration that give the houses their neo-colonial or neo-traditional "look." In the original Rancher variations, the front wall of the forward-facing wing and its side wall facing the driveway were treated as façade, contributing to the secondary status of the side-facing wing. Having devised a more equitable form for The Rancher by redesign the roof, the cladding materials were also better distributed across the wings. The front wall of the front-facing wing received sandstone cladding as did the narrow sections of wall on either side of the garage door(s). The other "public" walls, facing either the driveway or the street, were sheathed in wood shingles; the rest of the house was covered in the asbestos shingles as used elsewhere in Belair. While the model included an odd cupola perched over the garage, a small dovecote tucked into the front-facing gable, and window shutters, the overall redesign of The Rancher resulted in a more horizontal emphasis than its predecessors, which was the principal aesthetic appeal of the type. *The Washington Post* acknowledged this in 1963, noting that the model "is patterned after the sprawling homes of Western America."¹

The admirable and well-zoned L-shaped plan of The Rancher remained largely unchanged, with the bedrooms and two bathrooms grouped in the front-facing wing and the "active" and work areas (garage, laundry, kitchen-family room, and entry porch) in the side-facing wing (fig. 1). These were linked by an L-shaped entry hall and buffered by the living and dining rooms. The principal change to the plan was turning the

¹"Cape Cod, Rancher Popular at Belair," *The Washington Post* 14 Sep. 1963, sec. D: 16.

and refined the other by lowering the roof pitch and lining-up the ridges of the two wings, and cladding some of the exterior in sandstone and “hand-split shingles.”⁶

The Rancher’s low-slung profile and conventional neo-colonial detailing on its street elevation presented a blandly appealing face to prospective buyers, masking an undeniably modern interior that incorporated many of the latest planning trends for domestic space and was fully equipped with a full range of appliances and mechanical systems. As found in all of Belair’s houses, The Rancher provided an integral garage, a separate laundry area with standard washing machine and matching clothes dryer, and, most notably, whole house central air conditioning—a luxury at the time expected only in the most expensive new houses.⁷ With central air conditioning and laundry equipment offered in all models, most prospective buyers were likely satisfied with kitchens that came equipped with only a stove and refrigerator; only the two highest priced models featured dishwashers and in-sink garbage disposers. Still, the kitchens in all of the models were efficiently arranged with U-shaped layouts and nearly all included provisions for casual dining within or adjacent to the kitchen’s work area, a feature fast becoming indispensable to middle-class buyers.

In addition to a large, equipped kitchen, a front door that did not open directly into the living room, a clearly-defined “formal” dining area, and a second full bathroom topped the list of consumer desires at the time that Levitt and Sons was devising the Belair models. All of these elements were found in the Rancher and contributed to its popularity among buyers. The Rancher’s L-shaped plan was also well-organized with the three bedrooms occupying one wing that was buffered from the most active areas of the house (kitchen, laundry, garage) by the entry hall and formal living and dining rooms, which are situated at the house’s center.

In 1963, the *Washington Post* reported that The Cape Cod and The Rancher were the “two most popular houses” at Belair.⁸ Strong sales of The Rancher likely spurred the creation of an expanded variation called The Devon, which Levitt and Sons began offering in 1964. The Devon was, at its core, a Rancher that had been enlarged with the insertion of a standalone family room between the garage and the kitchen.⁹

⁶ For revamped model, see: “Unveiled by Levitt,” *The Washington Post* 3 Mar. 1962, sec. D: 7, and “New Rancher Popular at Belair,” *The Washington Post* 31 Mar. 1962, sec. D: 7.

⁷ Levitt and Sons, Inc., “Belair at Bowie, Maryland,” 1962, for information about included features and amenities. In author’s collection.

⁸ “Cape Cod, Rancher Popular at Belair,” *The Washington Post* 14 Sep. 1963, sec. D: 16.

⁹ “Ranch Model Is Enlarged,” *The Washington Post* 21 Mar. 1964, sec. E: 11; “New Rambler Shown at Belair,” *The Washington Post* 6 Jun. 1964, sec. E: 21. In 1967, Levitt and Sons began offering another, more modest, new one-story model “intended to attract newly married couples and people of retirement age.” It was smaller than The Rancher and contained within a compact, rectangular footprint. Despite its size, it competed well with the other models because of its generous front-facing portico. A furnished display house was constructed at the exhibit and sales center on Sussex Drive. “New Levitt Model,” *The Washington Post* 13 May 1967, sec. C: 34.

APPENDIX A: ILLUSTRATIONS